Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 02717 121825Z
ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
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INFO AMDMBASSY AMMAN 3826
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 2717

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y FOR PARA EIGHT

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4
TAGS: PEPR, SY, EG
SUBJ: PROSPECTS FOR SYRO-EGYPTIAN RECONCILIATION: THE VIEW FROM DAMASCUS

1. SUMMARY: DESPITE WIDESPREAD LOCAL BELIEF THAT NUMEIRI FAILED HERE IN HIS ATTEMPTS TO EFFECT SYRO-EGYPTIAN RECONCILIATION, MENA REP CONFIRMS REPORT CIRCULATING HERE THAT NUMEIRI TEMPTED SYRIANS WITH OFFER FROM SADAT TO END HIS INITIATIVE IN RETURN FOR RECONGNITION FROM SYRIA AND OTHER ARABS THAT HE HAD ACTED HONORABLY ON BEHALF OF ARAB CAUSE. MEANWHILE, SYRO-EGYPTIAN LINKS CONTINUE TO GROW QUITELY INCLUDING RESUMPTION OF EGYPTAIR FLIGHTS TO DAMASCUS AND NEGOTIATIONS CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 DAMASC 02717 121825Z

FOR SYRIAN PURCHASE OF EGYPTIAN RICE. MENA REP SEES POSSIBILITY FOR LIMITED EXCHANGE OF DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL. DESPITE CONTINUING SYRIAN OPPOSITION TO SADAT INITIATIVE, PROTRACTED BARGAINING PROCESS HAS BEGUN IN ORDER TO LAY FOUNDATION FOR AN EVENTUAL RECONCILIATION. END SUMMARY.

2. THE ACCEPTED WISDON HERE IS THAT NUMEIRI FAILED COMPLETELY

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

IN HIS RECENT MISSION TO EFFECT A SYRI-EGYPTIAN RECONCILIATION.
PRIOR TO HIS VISIT SYRIAN MEDIA INTENSIFIED CIRTICISM OF
SADAT AND CALLED FOR HIS DOWNFALL--LANGUAGE NOT USED FOR
SOME MONTHS. MININFO ISKANDAR AHMAD, FONMIN KHADDAM AND OTHERS
MADE STATEMENTS BOTH IN PUBLIC AND IN PRIVATE AFFIRMING THAT
SYRIA WAS NOT READY TO SIT DOWN WITH SADAT UNTIL HE OPENLY
RENOUNCED HIS INITIATIVE.

3. IN THE WAKE OF NUMEIRI'S VISIT, SYRIAN PRESS CONTINUES
TO HAMMER AT EGYPTIAN POLICIES, SEIZING ON ANY CONVENIENT
STATEMENT TO DISTORT SADAT'S POSITIONS, AND CHARGING HE IS
INTENT ON A SEPARATE SETTLEMENT. PRESIDENT ASSAD IS MORE
RESTRAINED BUT IN AN INTERVIEW HE GAVE TO THE UAE PAPER AL-WATHBA
PUBLISHED ON MAY 6 AND IN A SUBSEQUENT SPEECH TO THE SYRIAN
UNION OF TEACHERS, HE MADE IT CLEAR THAT SYRIA WAS UNWILLING
TO SIT DOWN WITH SADAT UNTIL "THE ROAD BETWEEN CAIRO AND
JERUSALEM IS CLOSED."

4. DESPITE THESE ASSERTIONS OF UNREMITTANT SYRIAN OPPOSITION
TO SADAT, WHE HAVE HEARD THAT NUMEIRI MADE AN INTRIGUING PRESEN-
TATION TO THE SYRIANS WHICH MAY GIVE THEM CAUSE FOR REFLECTION.
ACCORDING TO INFORMATION FRG PRESS ATTACHE OBTAINED FROM A
"WELL-INFORMED SYRIAN JOURNALIST" AND WHICH WAS SUBSEQUENTLY
CONFIRMED TO POLOFF "100 PERCENT" BY MENA EGYPTIAN REP HERE,
NAGIB AL-BADRI, NUMEIRI OUTLINED A SCENARIO TO SYRIANS WHEREIN
SADAT WOULD END HIS INITIATIVE. ACCORDING TO THIS REPORT,
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PAGE 03 DAMASC 02717 121825Z

SADAT WOULD ATTEND AN ARAB SUMMIT AND ANNOUNCE THAT, DESPITE
HIS SINCERE AND HONEST EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF THE ARAB CAUSE,
ISRAELI INTRANSIGENCE HAD PREVENTED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SATIS-
FACTORY RESULTS. SYRIA AND OTHER ARAB STATES WOULD THEN BE
EXPECTED TO EXPRESS UNDERSTANDING FOR SADAT'S INITIATIVE,
RECOGNIZE THAT HE HAD ACTED SINCERELY TO ACHIEVE A COMPRE-
HENSIVE SETTLEMENT AND BLAME ISRAEL FOR THE OUTCOME. THE
SYRIANS ALLEGEDLY REFUSED TO ALONG WITH THIS "OFFER," WHICH
NUMEIRI WAS TRANSMITTING ON SADAT'S BEHALF.

5. SOME SYRIAN-EGYPTIAN CONTACTS HAVE CONTINUED THROUGHOUT
THEIR LATEST BREAK IN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS, AND SIGNS EXIST
THAT THESE LINKS ARE INCREASING. EGYPTIAN AIRLINES THIS
WEEK RESUMED FLIGHTS INTO DAMASCUS (SYRIAN AIR ONLY BRIEFLY
SUSPENDED THEIR'S) AND FRESHLY PAINTED EGYPTAIR BILLBOARDS
HAVE APPEARED AROUND DAMASCUS. BESIDES MENA AND EGYPTAIR,
THE NASR TRADING COMPANY HAS CONTINUED TO MAINTAIN OFFICES HERE.
A SYRIAN DELEGATION IS PRESENTLY IN EGYPT NEGOTIATING THE
PURCHASE OF RICE AND LENTILS. AL-BADRI DENIED CURRENT LOCAL
RUMOR THAT THERE IS A CLANDESTINE ACCREDITED EGYPTIAN DIPLOMAT
IN DAMASCUS BUT AFFIRMED THAT "AN ADMINISTRATIVE EMPLOYEE,"
GHALI GIRYIS, HAD REMAINED IN THE EGYPTIAN LIAISON OFFICER UNDER

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

SAUDI AUSPICES THROUGHOUT THE BREAK (HE IS PRESENTLY ON LEAVE IN CAIRO). OTHER EGYPTIANS HAVE COME HERE FOR CONFERENCES AND SEMI-OFFICIAL VISITS INCLUDING THE WOMEN'S FEDERATION REPRESENTATIVES AND A DELEGATION OF SCIENTISTS.

6. BADRI, HIMSELF, CLAIMED TO BE ONE POINT OF CONTACT BETWEEN THE REGIMES. HE NOTED THAT ON MAY 10 HE HAD A CORDIAL MEETING WITH MININFO ISKANDAR AHMAD AND THAT HE ALSO SAW OTHER SENIOR SYRIAN OFFICIALS AND WIDE RANGE OF KNOWLEDGEABLE SYRIANS. HE SAID THIS WAS THE SECOND TIME ON HIS PRESENT TOUR (HE SERVED AS MENA'S REP IN SYRIA SOME YEARS PREVIOUSLY) THAT HE HAD ACTED AS LINK BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENTS DURING A BREAK IN RELATIONS. HE PERSONALLY FELT IT WAS VERY POSSIBLE THAT SOME DIPLOMATS WOULD SOON BE QUIETLY EXCHANGED WITH RE-
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PAGE 04 DAMASC 02717 121825Z

OPENING OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS TO FOLLOW SUBSEQUFTLY.

7. AL-BADRI URGED THAT THE US DO WHATEVER IT COULD TO ASSURE THE SYRIANS THAT EGYPT WAS NOT CONTEMPLATING A SEPARATE SETTLEMENT AND WAS ADHERING TO ARAB POSITIONS. HE BELIEVED THE SYRIANS WERE PARALYZED BY FEAR AND MISTRUST OF SADAT'S INTENTIONS. BOTH COUNTRIES NEED EACH OTHER IF PEACE WAS TO BE ACHIEVED AND SADAT, HE ASSERTED, WAS SIGNALLING THAT UNDER THE RIGHT CIRCUMSTANCES HE WAS READY FOR RECONCILATION. IF SUCH A RECONCILATION WAS EFFECTED, A NEW BASIS FOR PEACE TALKS COULD BE FOUND.

8. TURNING TO LEBANON, AL-BADRI PREDICTED THAT A SYRO-EGYPTIAN RAPPROACHMENT WOULD HAVE A SALUTORY EFFECT ON THE SITUATION THERE. HE PREDICTED THAT SYRIAN WOULD BE EMBOLDENED TO TIGHTEN UP ON THE PALESTINIANS ONCE IT NO LONGER HAD TO PLEDGE FEALTY TO THE "STEADFASTNESS FRONT." HE CLAIMED THAT EVEN NOW SYRIAN AID WAS GOING TO MISBAH BUDEIRI'S PLA RATHER THAN THE FEDAYEEN GROUPS.

9. OUR IMPRESSION IS THAT SYRIAN-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS ARE NEITHER AS BAD NOR AS GOOD AS VARIOUS PROPONENTS PROCLAIM. THE TALKS
BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES WERE NEVER SEVERED COM-PLETELY AND A PROTRACTED BARGAINING PROCESS IS NOW IN TRAIN TO SET THE STAGE FOR EVENTUAL RECONCILATION, EVEN IF TI IS STILL PREMATURE AND WITHOUT IMMEDIATE BENEFIT FROM SYRIAN POINT OF VIEW.
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